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4. CRITICAL PRACTICE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN HONG KONG: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the notion of critical practice in English language education (ELE) is explored through examples from the critical work of educators and researchers in Hong Kong. The paper then concludes with a discussion of both the challenges and possibilities of engaging in critical practice in ELE in Hong Kong and possibly in other East Asian contexts, where similar cultures of teaching and learning predominate.

INTRODUCTION

What is critical practice in education? Critical practice that has been inspired by Paulo Freire's work and writings (1973/1993 ; 1987a, 1987b, 1987c) emphasizes the need to empower students through raising critical consciousness, engaging in dialogue in a mode of reciprocity, and communication rather than transmission (ibid). In light of this critical project, how can critical practice be realized in English (as a second/foreign) language education in Hong Kong, where English language education has been institutionalized in deeply ideological (and colonial) traditions, cultures and practices? Some of these deep-rooted traditions include : native-speakerism, privileging of western-based standard English norms, strong emphasis on individual results in competitive public examinations, examination-driven teaching and learning cultures and so on.

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In the following sections some critical projects in ELE in Hong Kong conducted by the author and her colleagues will be outlined, and then the challenges and possibilities for future critical practice in ELE in Hong Kong and East Asian societies will be discussed. This review is, however, not meant to be exhaustive of all the critical work done in this region, but is meant to arouse exploration of further thoughts and actions on how critical work can be carried out in the future.

CRITICAL WORK ON DECONSTRUCTING NATIVE SPEAKER MYTHS (OPPRESSIVE MYTHS IN ELE)

Myths manipulate people (Freire, 1973/1993) and the many myths about the superiority of the colonizer's language and the beauty of 'native speaker' speech are still with us even in 'post'-colonial days. There has been some critical work to deconstruct the coloniality and hegemony of many of the language concepts that are still deeply rooted in people's minds in Hong Kong. The impact of these myths is found not only among education officials but also among school teachers, principals and students. For instance, Jasmine Luk and Angel Lin's study in the 2000s showed that the 'post-colonial' situation in Hong Kong has not improved much (Luk and Lin, 2006). There are still multiple instances showing the domination of native speaker myths and the myths about the superiority of English from the 'inner circle' countries (Kachru, 1986, 1992, 1996); i.e., Britain, the US, Canada, Australia.

The most powerful mechanism to bring about standardization of norms conforming to the inner circle-centric models in Hong Kong is by far the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT for short). The LPAT started to be enforced in 2001 to ensure that teachers of English and Putonghua all reach a publicly-recognized benchmark level in terms of language proficiency. Pronunciation is an assessment item for the read-aloud task of the speaking test and classroom language use. It was generally believed that only "native" speakers or speakers with "native-like" proficiency could attain level 5, which is the highest level in terms of pronunciation, stress and intonation because the descriptors at this level require pronunciation to be "completely error-free with no noticeable first language (L1) characteristics" (Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2000, p.110). These descriptors again allude to a close connection between pronunciation errors and L1 characteristics, and also imply that *error-free* pronunciation is also *accent-free* (Luk and Lin, 2006).

Apart from critical deconstruction of the coloniality of the native speaker myths, critical work has also been done to uncover the impact on students of the imposition of western teaching methodologies without local sociocultural integration. We shall examine this and other related issues in the next section.

CRITICAL WORK IN DECONSTRUCTING COLONIAL EDUCATION PRACTICES (IMPORTING FOREIGN CULTURAL AND PEDAGOGICAL MODELS)

Freire (1973/1993) stressed the importance of not giving recipes or prescriptions for other contexts: one must study the contexts and social conditions from which the methods have arisen and then re-make and re-create such methods for local

contexts. However, with the hegemony of western teaching methods and native speaker teachers (NETs)' authority, as reflected in most Hong Kong official education discourses, we witnessed the alienating effect of such 'cultural invasion', or 'extension' in Freire's terms (1973/1993, p. 89), in some classrooms in Hong Kong. For instance, Luk, 's study (2005) shows how the extension of the communicative language teaching method by a NET to a Hong Kong classroom (through requiring students to perform an information-gap task without local cultural integration: finding Grandma's false teeth) created resistance of the students out of extreme boredom and alienation:

The purpose of the [communicative language teaching] task reveals a basic sociocultural incongruity. The communicative context that presents the need to hide and find Grandma's false teeth is rather inauthentic to most local students. Given the small size of flats in Hong Kong, it is highly unlikely that students would live with their Grandma. Even if they do, their Grandma's false teeth are seldom young people's choice of objects with which to make fun.... It might have explained why the two girls seem to have problems understanding how to perform such a seemingly simple task. GS1 [The first student]'s 'I give up' (line 12) reveals her frustration at not being able to make sense of the meaning and purpose of the activity because the communication setup did not allow any *space* for any form of self-representation. Anything said remains 'noises' rather than 'voices'. (Luk, 2005, p. 256 ; italics original)

The above analysis by Luk resonates with Freire's notion that a literacy programme must start with the learners' lived experience and allow space for learners to read the world before they read the word, and to create and re-create meanings important to them using the words (Freire, 1973/1993 ; 1998 ; Freire and Macedo, 1987). Otherwise, anything said in such literacy classrooms will just be meaningless 'noises' rather than 'voices' expressing 'selves', as Luk aptly concludes :

... a communicative situation, one with a group of people and an information gap that needs to be bridged through communication, does not necessarily lead to *genuine* communication without the mediation of communicative space for the students to enter into with a need to express their selves. (Luk, 2005, p. 264 ; italics original)

As Freire puts it, such cultural extension of foreign methods without local sociocultural integration reflects the ignorance of some foreign 'specialists', who are, however, often accorded prestigious status due to colonial myths about the superiority of inner circle native speakers and their teaching methods.

Does the above discussion lead to the suggestion that we should revert to traditional methods of teaching ? This should not be the only or necessary conclusion. Between the option of an uncritical extension of foreign pedagogical and cultural models and the option of staying with traditional methods that do not make changes that respond to students' needs, there should be other innovative options. It is to critical work in this area that we shall turn in the next section.

CRITICAL, INNOVATIVE PROJECTS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Given the fact that most students in Hong Kong have come from families and communities that use mainly Cantonese as their everyday language, the teaching and learning of English constitutes an uphill task in many schools, where both teachers and students tend to see English as a barrier to overcome for examination and future studies or job purposes, rather than as a tool to explore the world, to communicate, to create and re-create meanings, and to construct and express themselves. The direct importation and extension of western pedagogical models, as we have seen above, often proves to be counter-productive and alienating. However, there have also been some critical innovative projects pioneered in such difficult contexts. Below we shall look at two such preliminary attempts.

(a) Tracy re-making the context with her students who have previously given up on learning English :

The first attempt by a student teacher to create a new space for students who had given up on learning English was reported in Angel Lin and Jasmine Luk's 2002 study. Below are excerpts from the study:

In the Autumn of 2001, a student teacher, Tracy (pseudonym, was assigned to a working class school to do her 5-week practicum (Practice Teaching) as part of the requirements for her B.A. (TESL) degree. Tracy kept a diary of her Practice Teaching experience as part of her practicum work, which included both a teaching component and a self-reflection component. At the end of the practicum, Tracy shared her experiences with the first author (the researcher) and gave permission to the researcher for citing her diary for research and educational purposes.

About the school and the class:

The school that Tracy was assigned to was a government secondary school located next to a working class public housing estate in a new town. Tracy was responsible for taking all the English language lessons of class 2B (Secondary 2 or Grade 8 in the N. American System). There were 40 students in the class, half boys and half girls, aged around twelve to thirteen. According to her cooperating teacher (her practicum supervisor in the school, and the original English teacher of the class), class 2B was second best at Secondary 2 level in the school, where classes had been streamed according to their academic standards and learning attitudes. However, to Tracy's dismay, her first lesson with the class gave her a hard landing in a real classroom setting (i.e., as opposed to her previous micro-teaching experience in a simulated classroom setting at the university). Below are excerpts from her first journal (29/10/2001) as well as her 19th journal (27/11/2001) one month later (italics added):

29/10/2001 Journal 1

Recap of the lesson

- Write 5 sentences about one of their classmates.

- Students are put into groups of four.
- The four students in the group are numbered as S1, S2, S3 and S4.
- Read out the sentences to the group members and ask him/her to guess who this person is.

Reflection

Today I was very depressed. Nobody listened to me. I was not well prepared for these two lessons because my cooperating teacher said earlier that she needed both lessons to complete answer-checking¹ with the class, and that I didn't need to take the lessons. However, in the last minute, she suddenly told me it was unnecessary and I could have the two lessons back. I had prepared a speaking activity and one writing activity for them, and it was too late for me to realize during the lessons that the class was not ready to do any tasks different from their textbook exercises.

In these two lessons, nobody listened to me. Maybe they did not understand their job or they did not know how to 'speak English' with their neighbors – they might never have had this experience before. I just asked them to read what they wrote to their neighbors but then the whole class lost control and started chatting with one another on non-lesson topics. I guess I have introduced a cooperative learning method, which, however, seemed to be unfamiliar to them. They had a big chance to fool around and talk and become off-task. I have never thought about the students would not even know how to read the sentences to their neighbours. Their speaking did not involve simultaneous thinking. In no more than ten minutes, the class turned into chaos. I felt helpless in the classroom and suddenly I opened my mouth and said something which was from the bottom of my heart to the students. My English was not that good in the secondary school especially my spoken English. I told them I could not say a word in the oral examination practice at Secondary 4. I could not say a complete sentence when I was a year one student at the City University. I told them I have really put great efforts in improving my speaking ever since. I trained myself not to read the Chinese subtitles of the English TV programmes. I forced myself to read South China Morning Post even though I disgusted reading English newspapers. I talked to myself using the dialogues from English TV dramas. I told them that they could have all spoken good English if they would treasure the learning opportunities they now have. Then the class turned to silence and everyone was looking at me. I spent more than fifteen minutes to say those words and I said them in Cantonese. After that, the students started to do the speaking task I had assigned and then the lesson ended.

I wanted to cry at that time but I held back the tears. I had thought about not becoming a teacher after my graduation. However, when I settled down and pulled myself together, I said to myself it was just the first day. Progress could be made and I should do my best to solve the problems. Then I started to plan for the next day's lessons because I had to change my lesson plans.

I was shocked when I looked back at the lessons. I introduced a cooperative learning method to a class who did not have much pair work experience before. No wonder they had no idea what to do and just played with their classmates during the task time. I was definitely not prepared well for this task and I expected they could all understand the task. Angel told me that the students had the reason to be off-task – because they did not know how to start the task; they did not have any experience of doing pair work in the past. I have to admit that I planned the lessons

wrongly. I tried the task out in a small group of elite students in a band 2 class² successfully and I assumed that there should not be any problem when I tried it out in a real classroom setting.

27/11/2001 Journal 19

I have so much to say. Today was really a great challenge. Last week I told them that they had to stay after school if they did not do their projects and I would teach them how to do it. So I asked who had not started doing the project yet. More than half of them put up their hands. ... *Later, I told them that the reason for carrying out the project was that in doing the project they could have the chance to use English in a meaningful context. I told them that two boys from their class had completed an English interview yesterday, and they had never thought they could do it before. Then the class seemed to be more understanding.* I had to admit that I spent so little time on teaching them how to do the project but I had given them everything they needed in advance. They said they knew how to do but they just forgot everything afterwards. I felt so bad and disappointed I doubt that whether I am asking them to do something that they were incapable of because of my inadequate input. ...

In fact, one group of girls had submitted their project and it really surprised me. Their work was so fantastic. I think I should be happy with this piece of great work. ...

Back to my teaching, I played a song to them and asked them to fill in the blanks in the lyrics. They did not do the task during the first time I played the song. *I told them the reason behind this task after playing the song. I told them I wanted to help them develop an interest in listening to English songs. Moreover, they could learn English from the media and it was more interesting. After I had said these words, they started trying to capture the words during the second time I played the song. Most of them were able to fill in two-three blanks. At that time, I realized how important it was to explain to my students the objectives of the tasks. Sometimes students do not engage in the task possibly because they do not know what to do or why they have to do it.* ...

I waited for the class outside the music room because I had to prevent anyone of them leaving the school. Today I said to them that they would have an 'after class meeting' for the project. In fact, it was the input session. Students' response was unexpected. When they knew that the marks for the project would be counted in their coursework section of the year (in fact, my cooperating teacher had never said yes to it), the girls suddenly became concerned about the project very much. They asked how they could get high marks for their project. I photocopied a project done by their classmates which had been the first submitted to me. It was effective to motivate them to put more efforts in the project. Some boys just wanted to get a pass. I let them leave at 3:45 pm. So actually it was not a detention.

Analysis and Discussion:

In the above diary excerpts, we see a student-teacher armed with progressive liberal pedagogies that she had learnt from the university going into a non-middle class school setting trying to implement these pedagogies (e.g., cooperative

learning tasks, pair and group work, integrated language projects). However, her students had been used to the traditional learning and teaching approaches adopted by the original teacher (the cooperating teacher) and the school, where teachers mostly did textbook exercises and answer-checking with students and where project work had never been done before and project marks would not count as part of the coursework marks. The western progressive liberal pedagogies that the student-teacher had learnt, however, had not prepared her for what to do when students did not respond well to these pedagogies, because these pedagogies, as we understand, have originally arisen from middle class conditions and have not built into their canons ways of adapting them to non-middle class conditions where both the right attitudes and linguistic and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1973, 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) to benefit from these pedagogies are missing. The student-teacher had also chosen a middle class setting (a band 2 class³) as the simulated classroom when she did her micro-teaching practice at the university.

The student-teacher (and we as teacher-educators and classroom researchers, too) are confronted with an important, ethical decision: should the teacher press on with the progressive liberal pedagogies, or should she give up and revert to the traditional teaching approaches which the students were apparently more accustomed to (e.g., doing a textbook exercise or grammar worksheet and not connecting this to their life experience)?

In the diary excerpts of Tracy above, however, we see a resilient attempt on her part to explain with all sincerity to her students why and how the tasks and projects were useful to them, through sharing her own learning experiences with the students (e.g., she could not speak one complete English sentence in her own oral examination at Secondary 4 because she had not had any chance to do any pair speaking in her previous learning). We see her engaging students in a dialogue and giving her own testimony (sharing her own stories of learning English) and discussing with the students the goals of doing such a task. This resonates with Freire's notion and practice of conscientization (1973/1993).

In a way, through giving extra attention and support to her students outside class, she partially compensated for the lack of middle class attitudes and linguistic and cultural capitals on the part of her students for responding well to and benefiting from progressive pedagogies, which in the long run will give them the proficiency needed to compete with the middle class graduates in the society (e.g., in the public oral exams or in the university). Tracy, drawing on her own English learning experiences, knows just too well how far behind in English she would have been if she had just accepted the traditional English teaching and learning methods she herself was subjected to when she was a secondary school student. She, therefore, went to lengths to both help her students to realize the benefits of these approaches and to provide them with the necessary capitals to benefit from such approaches while also adapting them to suit her students. She does this by engaging students in a dialogue, by explicitly discussing with her students to goals of doing such a task, and by offering students extra support and scaffolding outside class to enable them to accomplish the task, instead of simply 'extending' an imported progressive teaching method without adapting and recreating it for the local context.

Through the agency of Tracy, the English learning context of the students has been partially re-shaped or re-created. While Tracy could not totally change the examination system and the textbook-exercise-driven curriculum and school culture, she introduced some alternative elements into the setting, which have

initiated some changes among her students. At the end of her 5-week practicum, her students (including a boy who said who hated her in the beginning days) gathered around her, asking her to come back to teach them in the future, and telling her that they had become more interested and confident in learning English (a description of this is found in her last journal entry). By re-articulating and re-making some of the forces which formed the context in which her students were situated, Tracy was partially successful in working together with her students to bring about transformation, as evidenced in the more positive English learning attitudes of her students and in their development of a confident, competent English language learner identity.

(b) Piloting ELT Rap as an Extra-curricular Activity in a Working Class School

From September 2006 to June 2007 Angel Lin and Evelyn Man piloted a project entitled “ELT Rap resident artist project” in one Band 3 school. Local hip hop artists were brought into the school to conduct after-school hip hop rap and hip hop dance workshops with students.

As the project progressed, the students worked with the workshop team to develop a finale performance programme. The finale show was hosted in February 2007 in the school hall and was attended by over 800 students, teachers and parents.

For the many limited-English-proficiency participants at the school, rapping seemed to be easier to approach as a “speaking” rather than “listening” activity as it requires “speaking” or “spitting the words” at a fast speed; hence, words are often not very clear and comprehension can be difficult. Students with higher English proficiency would take less time to rehearse and could rap at a much faster pace, whereas students with lower English proficiency would have a much slower pace in rapping; and some felt discouraged seeing others rapping so fast when they rap together.

In spite of these difficulties, the rap songs created a fun, meaningful context to the use of English and seemed to be appealing to the students. The artists’ demonstrations had a strong modeling effect, both in learning ELT raps and in the learning attitude itself. It became clear throughout the project that the students bonded well with the artists and showed respect for their talents. It was also clear that the English tutor was only able to build credibility if she expressed knowledge about hip hop and rap. Without a “cool” hip hop image, students would only seek language support from the ELT tutor but not also identify with her as a role model in language learning.

The participating students expressed positive views towards this way of learning English. Some said they have learned useful phonics skills which they can transfer to their regular English learning (e.g., they can now sound out new English words). Most said they have increased their self-confidence through performing their songs in the finale show. After the project ended, some students continued their friendships with the artists, regularly joining in the artists’ local hip hop gigs in community centres. A few of them continue to write Chinese and bilingual raps on their own. Some students have also asked the English tutor to teach them more rhyming words so that they can have more words to write their rap lyrics.

Constructing Positive Identities through Lyrics

In the finale show, a group of workshop participants had written a “Thank you Artists” song to express thanks to the artist instructors of the workshops. The song was written in mainly in Cantonese and performed in the finale show by the students. Below are excerpts from the song lyrics which illustrate their newfound confidence about their campus and school life. English translations of the lines are provided in the right column:

(4)

電腦設備又係度
不斷更新

There are computer facilities here
Always upgrading

...

...

呢個地方唔可以缺少嘅一份子
indispensable here

They (referring to students) are all

努力認同求學習就個個都

All are working hard studying
diligently

...

...

...唔再俾人砌低
唔再做一頭縮頭烏龜

No longer beaten by others
No longer chicken out like a shy
tortoise

...

Thank you Artists!

The expression of confidence and self-worth in these lyrics is very significant, given the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) of these working class students. Traditionally in Hong Kong, students from low banding schools, which are usually located in low-income housing areas, are stigmatized in society and labeled as ‘losers’ in general. In this song, the students are expressing a message of self-assertion—both asserting the good facilities of the school (the ever-upgrading computer equipment) and the new self-image of students: everyone is hardworking and hence becoming indispensable; they are no longer feeling like losers beaten by others nor chickening out like a shy tortoise who has to hide its head in its shell. They are using metaphors to express a new powerful identity that they are constructing both for their own school and the students in this school. It is significant that they are not referring to themselves directly but addressing this message to everyone in the school, as they are performing this song to all students and teachers in the finale show in the school hall. Coming from the students’ own creative self-expression, this message is significant. It might be said that the hip hop music and the rap genre and the self-reliant, self-assertive attitude as embodied by hip hop culture and the artists themselves seem to have inspired these students to feel a renewed confidence about their own school and the students in this school.

The artists were also interviewed (together with some of their workshop students who hung around them) right after the finale show. Below are English translations of excerpts from the interview data. Many of the excerpts show that the workshop team observed changes in the students’ willingness to express themselves across time, an important factor in both rapping and speaking English. MC Chef points out how the students seem to have developed a new sense of self

through the project as they cultivated a hip hop persona. This new, more confident self seems to show up in classrooms as well, as one student indicates below:

MC Chef: I've noticed the students... because of hip hop, they would actually pick up a pen and start writing their own raps. And they've changed so much! Maybe this thing [rap]... Because hip hop has changed my whole life, so I want more people can get to know it. In the first lesson, they knew nothing, and now, after they the tenth lesson, they had a show, and create raps at home; I noticed that they've put hard work into it. They are not playing but serious about it. They can express their feelings and opinions through raps. It's good... it's a means to let others get to know them. Sometimes teachers don't understand their students' feelings. But through this chance now... the teachers can notice that the students have turned into someone else on the stage, becoming more confident... Although the time given was limited, the students showed great dedication and effort. Their performance... you can see the result! I really think they are superb!

Another student resonates with MC Chef on this:

S5 rap mentee: After learning raps from MC Chef, my Chinese composition improves. And now during the English lessons, when there are words that are a bit challenging, because of the phonic skills learnt in the programme, I know how to decode the words. And get more praises from teachers! My English teacher... I used to be unable to decode the words and pronounce them correctly, but because of the method (referring to phonics) I learnt, I know how to pronounce the words and my teacher praises me for this improvement.

The students frequently reported that they worked very hard once they committed to the project, a behavior often not attributed to working class schoolchildren from low-banding schools. This hard work was also noted by the workshop team artists who were impressed with the students' capacity to learn new things in a relatively short period of time. Their comments characterize the students as 'quick learners', 'hard workers', and 'highly capable' rappers.

The school's teachers and administrators were also interviewed after the finale show, and their comments revealed similar observations regarding the students' growing confidence and their willingness to express themselves in English.

Transforming Youth Identities through the Hip Hop Experience

Upon the completion of this pilot project, 10 students of the school were invited to perform their ELT Rap songs at the English Festival 2007 kick-off ceremony. They performed rapping three English songs and one Chinese song. This was a glorious moment for the school and the students and has boosted the overall morale of the school. The school had originally been selected by the Hong Kong Education Bureau for consideration of closing down due to decreasing new student enrollments. However, this event enhanced the school's public image and has partially contributed to the cancellation of the government's plan of closing down the school.

Overall, the direction of using hip hop music to engage students in using English to express their own voice, and to enhance their phonological awareness

and rhyming and creative verbal skills is promising. Further curriculum research is needed to refine the curriculum for different learning styles and interest levels of students and different school contexts. Based on the data, however, we have come to realize both the potential and challenges of capitalizing on students' desire for and investment in popular cultural artistic identities in transforming their habitus, in particular, their attitude towards and relationship with English. The central difficulty experienced in this pilot project seems to be that the local hip hop artists participating in this project themselves have limited English capital. Our research team has sought to compensate for this with the provision of an English tutor who has worked closely and collaboratively with the artists. However, when it comes to identification with their role models, students tend to identify much more readily with the "cool" local artists than the English tutor.

Coda : Challenges and Possibilities for Critical Practice in ELE

The studies discussed in this paper are by no means exhaustive and there are other critical studies done in Hong Kong : e.g., Lo & Clarke, 2010 ; Lin, 2004 ; Luk, under review. However, due to limited space, not all the critical studies can be included.

Those studies that are included above, however, do illustrate both the challenges and possibilities for engaging in critical practice in ELE. The chief challenge confronting critical education workers is, perhaps, that of how to carve out a space for doing critical work under a highly packed curriculum, driven by pressures of high-stake examinations, especially in schools where the administrative culture is not supportive of any critical, creative work that departs from drilling students for examinations and tests. Teacher workload is another difficult issue. With increasing paper work incurred by internal and external evaluations of school teachers' work, there is less and less time for teachers to embark on creative, innovative projects that venture out of the safe space afforded by textbook worksheets and drills. Increasing administrative pressure on university educators and researchers to publish in a narrow range of non-local citation-indexed journals also poses challenges to education researchers who want to engage in critical projects in local contexts that address the needs of local learners (Lin, 2009). While one cannot expect to overcome all these difficulties overnight, there might perhaps be some possibilities of carrying on with our critical work. Below I propose some possible directions for future critical practice in ELE:

1. While many formerly colonial societies in Asia have formally become postcolonial, there are still deep-rooted colonial myths and belief systems which are firmly subscribed to consciously or unconsciously by many people in these societies. Therefore, the de-colonization work is unfinished and critical work is still needed, especially in the spheres of changing the structure of knowledge production, subjectivity and cultural imaginary (Chen, 2010 ; Lin, in press). We still need to continue to deconstruct the many myths pervasive in the field of ELE (e.g., native speakerism, the supposed superiority of models of teaching imported from western contexts).
2. More critical studies need to be conducted by teacher-researchers and/or teachers and researchers in collaboration in the schools and classrooms, with

concrete everyday examples to deconstruct the coloniality of actual classroom practices.

3. Critical work also needs to move away from doing just critique ; it should also provide examples of how teaching and learning can be done alternatively ; i.e., from doing only *critical deconstruction* to doing *critical construction* (e.g., the hip hop school project reviewed in this chapter is an example of trying out an alternative pedagogy that might provide resources for young people to construct positive identities in ELE).

The challenges facing us are still daunting. We are, however, hopeful that critical educators in Hong Kong and in other East Asian contexts, who are often faced with similar challenges, can share experiences and visions through what the cultural studies scholar, Chen Kuan-Hsing, calls 'acts of inte-referencing' (Chen, 2010) to learn from each other's experiences and insights (see some suggestions in Lin, 2009). While our attempts at critical practice in ELE are often full of difficulties, we must not lose hope, as Freire reminds us that as teachers we do not just teach English, Geography, History, or the subjects, but we must also try to tackle together with our students issues of social injustice in an effort to read the world so that we can also read the word (Freire, 1998).

ENDNOTES

1. Answer-checking is a typical classroom practice, especially in working class schools, in Hong Kong. Typically, students are assigned some textbook exercises to do quietly on their own or at home, and then afterwards, the teacher uses a whole-class IRF discourse format to elicit answers to textbook questions from students, and give students the correct model answers if students' answers are not correct. See Lin, 1999 for critical analyses of these classroom practices.
2. That was the simulated classroom setting that the student-teacher designed for her micro-teaching practice at the university.
3. In Hong Kong, schools are classified into different bands according to their academic standards. Band 2 at that time was an above-average band.

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